

## 2005 could see strides in S.A. arts

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The arts in San Antonio spent last year marking time, preparing for a more newsworthy - perhaps - 2005.

County Judge Nelson Wolff's 2003 proposal for an employer-based campaign of arts support - modeled on United Way's payroll checkoff - looks as though it might bear fruit this year. The effort, originally dubbed "Bexar County Arts and **Cultural** Fund," has been renamed "The Fund." More to the point, it has some actual dollars to work with.

Commitments totaling \$130,000 have come from Toyota North America, Phyllis Browning Company, Humana South Texas and SBC Foundation, among others. Once the total reaches \$180,000, the Tobin Endowment will kick in \$20,000.

James McNutt, who started consulting for The Fund after resigning as president of the Witte Museum last spring, says a \$200,000 kitty "won't take care of all (the startup cost), but it will take care of most of it. We can hire an executive director, open an office and have a campaign." Look for a press conference as early as next month to launch the first campaign.

There's no telling how much money such a campaign might raise, and the take in the early years is likely to be small.

One possible indicator: In a well-crafted overview of the city's arts infrastructure, McNutt noted that united arts funds in Louisville, Ky., and Charlotte, N.C., metropolitan regions of comparable population, had raised \$7.6 million and \$10.2 million, respectively.

In the same report, McNutt cited statistics showing San Antonio eating the dust of the other major Texas cities in terms of per-capita arts support from local government. The champion was Dallas, at \$11.92. San Antonio, at \$2.78, won the booby prize. (The figures are from 2002.) San Antonio is also anemic in the total operating expenditures of its nonprofit **cultural** organizations. Which leads to another likely newsmaker in the arts this year - the final report of the city's **cultural** planning process, called "The **Cultural Collaborative**."

The first draft, made public in October, was a disaster in its organization, writing and content - but otherwise not too bad.

Felix Padron, the city's director of **cultural** affairs, anticipates a greatly improved revision sometime this month. If it fulfills its promise - a long shot, at this point - it could be a playbook for building San Antonio's **cultural** resources, reaching larger and more diverse audiences and making use of the arts' potential to fuel economic growth.

One possible initiative, touted lately by Padron: Reconfiguring Municipal Auditorium for use as a symphony-opera-ballet venue. That idea is certain to be controversial, and likely to yield an inadequate venue if the city tries to stay within the cost range Padron has suggested - \$20 million to \$30 million.

My hunch is that the **cultural** plan will have less of a favorable influence on the local arts economy than will two other public ventures now under way - the San Antonio River improvement project and the South Side Initiative.

The former could open the floodgates, as it were, for intensive mixed-use development along

Broadway, bringing an upscale and committed arts audience close to the central city's concentration of **cultural** institutions.

The selection of traditional planning gurus Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk to do master planning for the city's new southern territory portends a serious effort to create urban nodes, and thus fertile ground for the arts.

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